

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council of Chester-le-Street held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 28 June 2007 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Humes (Chairman)

Councillors:

G Armstrong	M May
S Barr	P H May
JW Barrett	PB Nathan
L E W Brown	K Potts
R Court	M Potts
G K Davidson	JM Proud
L Ebbatson	J Shiell
P Ellis	T Smith
M J Gollan	D Thompson
S Greatwich	A Turner
R Harrison	F Wilkinson
DM Holding	SCL Westrip
CJ Jukes	A Willis

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), L Chambers (Director of Resources), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), J McConnell (Chief Internal Auditor), P Stephens (Acting Director of Community Services), A Aynsley (Acting Housing Services Manager), G Clark (ICT Manager), C Harvey (Human Resources and Policy Manager), I Herberon (Accountancy Manager) J Elder (Finance and Risk Manager), C Duane-Latham (Accounting Technician), J Bradley (Assistant Solicitor) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance were J Dafter (Audit Manager) and 3 members of the public.

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Sekowski, AK Holden, JM Proud, W Laverick, SA Henig and D Robson.

21 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 31 MAY 2007.

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 31 May 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That ‘not’ be deleted from the last line of the penultimate paragraph on page 15 of the minutes.

2. That the second paragraph on page 22 of the minutes be amended to read;
‘Councillor Proud stated that she had not used her manifesto to mud sling for political gain and confirmed that within her manifesto she had stated that she was proud to be part of this Council and that this was something she had said in honesty.’

3. That subject to the above amendments the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

22 PUBLIC SPEAKING

No requests had been received from members of the public to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Council’s agreed policy.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members

24 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council reported:

Key Decisions

Land to the front of 13 Esk Avenue, Great Lumley

“That the land be declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and be disposed of for the requested purposes, subject to the applicant being responsible for all the Council’s costs associated with the disposal of land in accordance with the Council adopted Land Disposal Policy and procedures.”

Land adjacent to 34 Walden Close, Ouston

“That the land is not declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and is not disposed of for the purposes requested.”

Land to the rear of 52 Holly Crescent, Sacriston

- “1 That the area indicated on the plan attached to the report is not declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and that the request to purchase the land be refused.
- 2 That the applicant be allowed to purchase the land immediately to the rear of 52 Holly Crescent, subject to the applicant being responsible for all the Council’s costs associated with the disposal of land in accordance with the Council adopted Land Disposal Policy and procedures and subject to consultation with neighbours.”

Recent Floods

The Leader reminded of the need to be aware of the adaptive and mitigating measures necessary to deal with climate change. She said that local government had a key role to play as the rains on the previous Saturday demonstrated, people turn to the Council for help and support. Local authorities are responsible for the seemingly small things like sandbags and gully cleaning; to energy efficiency; to large scale procurement. She advised the Council had signed up to the Nottingham Declaration, and as a member of the Regional Task Group on climate change, ways in which local authorities can protect and enhance the social, economic and environmental future of the north east, were being examined.

The Leader thanked the staff who responded to the calls at the weekend, with particular reference to Careline, housing services and environmental services staff and the Chief Officers who co-ordinated the response.

Corporate Performance Assessment

The Leader advised that on 12 June 2007 the Audit Commission published the result of the CPA re-assessment that saw the Council move to a ‘Good’ classification – the most radically improved Council in the country.

As a way of celebrating this achievement Councillor M May had suggested to the Leader the holding of an Open Day. The Leader advised this had been considered for a number of years and as the Council will be engaged in various activities during Local Democracy Week in October an Open Day could be a part.

The Leader added that visitors were always welcome at the Civic Centre and the previous week a School Council held it’s meeting in the Council Chamber.

Local Government Review

The Leader stated that much of the Council’s future would be determined by the outcome of consultations on Local Government Review and all Members will have received a copy of the District Councils’ response to the proposal for a single county-wide unitary Council.

The Leader reported the turnout for the Referendum was good and 76% of the respondents voted against the County Council proposal and she advised that District Leaders and Chief Executives had met with a Local Government Minister and Civil Servants to raise concerns at the dubious financial case and proposals regarding community involvement and engagement. The expected decision date was the end of July although changes in the Cabinet may have an affect on this.

Change in Prime Minister

The Leader said that Tony Blair's leadership had seen enormous changes including a lower than the national average unemployment rate in Chester-le-Street; investment in housing stock both public and private had risen year on year; and educational performance across all schools was better than ever.

The Leader said she felt sure that people of all political persuasions would agree that, as Tony Blair said in his valedictory speech to the House of Commons, 'politics may on occasion be the scene of low skulduggery – more often it is the pursuit of noble causes.

The plans of the new Prime Minister, for the public sector and local government were awaited with interest.

Cestria Community Housing

The Leader congratulated Ian Broughton on being appointed Chief Executive of Cestria Community Housing and Paul Stephens on being appointed as Director of Housing and Community. The transfer was expected to be completed by the end of 2007 and until then the current arrangements would continue to operate.

In conclusion, the Leader said she looked forward to seeing the Council work in partnership with a strong RSL to the benefit of the whole District.

25 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Resources and Value for Money

There was no report from Councillor SA Henig.

b. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

Councillor CJ Jukes reported as follows:

In relation to completion of an Area Development Framework for Sacriston, production of the framework document was almost complete to enable further sustainable regeneration of Sacriston.

Pelton Fell regeneration work continued and a further meeting of the Partnership Board would be held in July 2007.

Regeneration work in Grange Villa continued particularly in building social capital and consulting the local community on land issues.

In the Town Centre, despite recent bad weather, market stalls take up remained strong and a programme of events and activities in the Civic Heart was in preparation.

Councillor Jukes advised that total spend on regeneration of the town centre in the previous four years had been £4,938,631, made up of MILE House £1,453,255, Streetscaping £1,087,242, Civic Heart £888,095, Culvert Strengthening £660,164 and Market Redesign £284,602.

The main sources of funding were, ONE Single Programme Grant £2,514,838, District Council £2,098,604, and Developers' Contributions £165,700, with all funding coming from capital funding sources not out of Council Tax revenue expenditure, Grant funding arrangements meant that had work not commenced by the end of the last financial year, the near 60% of external funding financing Town Centre Regeneration would have been lost.

Councillor Jukes advised it was worth reflecting that regenerating the Town Centre had attracted literally thousands of pounds of advertising for Chester-le-Street and that every £1 of money invested by the Council attracted £30 from external sources. In addition, the total level of investment in the District from external sources in the previous few years was over £130M which reflected the desirability of Chester-le-Street as a place to live, to work and to operate enterprises from.

In relation to the Town Centre Masterplanning exercise, Councillor Jukes advised that with other Executive Members and Officers, he met the Consultants and further work was on-going.

On the Local Development Framework, Councillor Jukes advised he would be ensuring that LDF milestones were met and that there was a robust framework in areas such as regeneration, strategic planning, housing strategy and land use.

With regard to Leisure Options, Councillor Jukes advised that he and Councillors Barr and Westrip would be joining the Steering Group as Leisure Options Phase Two compliments other work within community and the Council.

In conclusion, Councillor Jukes advised of the following strategic meetings since the last Council Meeting:

- With Officers in relation to the Council's response to the Regional Economic Strategy
- With Members and Officers from the County Durham Districts and the County Council in respect of the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy

- The Local Strategic Partnership's Chairs Group in his capacity as Chair of the Economic and Regeneration Policy Group

c. Community Engagement and Partnership

Councillor S Barr reported on the following:

Community Engagement Strategy

Important steps in the review of the Community Engagement Strategy would commence the following month with the setting up of two Working Groups.

One group will be within the Council and include all key Service Teams. The other will include all of our key partners through the Local Strategic Partnership.

A key aim is to ensure that an updated strategy can effectively underpin the delivery of Neighbourhood Management, community led regeneration and health & well-being.

The Council Strategy review is due by March 2008.

Member Development

Work was underway to develop a new strategy for Member Development, taking into account the issues connected with the White Paper and new role of the Front Line Councillor. The strategy will focus upon two areas; development and to support Members. Once a draft strategy is available, the Members Steering Group will be reconvened.

Next round of Member Support Assessments

Provisionally arranged to take place on 5th and 14th September.

Member's Role Descriptions

Role descriptions were available for the various roles held by elected Members and were available on disc and hard copy.

360 Degree Appraisal for Elected Members

The Council was awarded £10,000 for 360 degree appraisal for elected Members through the Improvement Partnership. The process would commence with a pilot with Executive Members.

Training Plan 2007

A copy of the training plan for Members had been circulated

IT

IT will play a bigger role in making the Council more accessible as technology and capacity evolves with improvements in websites for the LSP and the IT team was working on a range of projects aimed to improve efficiency and help our residents:

- Document Management Systems for Planning
- On-line benefits calculator with Revenues & Benefits
- Anti Social Behaviour system for Community safety
- Land & Property Management with Regeneration Team
- Working on Document Management for the whole of the Council and looking at best practice with other Councils
- Also, the two PC's in the Members room were being replaced

Democratic Services

Councillor Barr assured Members that democracy was alive and well in Chester-le-Street due to the initiative of Colin Turnbull and the Democratic Services Team. He was delighted to be present when children from Chester-le-Street CE Junior School visited the Council Chamber the previous Friday to hold their School Council Meeting.

The School children really enjoyed themselves and the red lights were flashing on and off - it was like Blackpool illuminations.

Councillor Barr issued a word of warning to Members...When a Council Officer congratulated the children for their excellent participation, he said it was the best debate he had seen in the Council Chamber in more than 20 years.

d. Neighbourhood Services

Councillor SCL Westrip reported as follows:

Leisure Services

Leisure Centre Quest Assessment

The Leisure Centre had applied for a Quest accreditation which was a leisure industry specific quality standard based on a requirement for quality services and continual improvement. An action plan had been produced and staff were working through all the key actions identified.

Selby Cottage Childcare Centre

The improved outdoor area and facilities were almost complete. The work enlivened the whole area and provided superb play and learning opportunities for the children.

Game On Football

Councillor Westrip advised that this project looked to engage young people in football as a way of motivating them to look after their healthy and inspire them to change their lives for the better by taking a positive route.

Tennis

The three tennis courts at Riverside had been fully refurbished following a £51,000 grant from Barclay's who also confirmed a £20,000 revenue funding grant to support the development of tennis on the site. Councillor Westrip made specific reference to Councillor Smith's involvement in obtaining the funding.

Spinning

The Leisure Centre had introduced spinning (Static Cycling) as an activity and it that had proved an enormous success.

Test Match

The England v West Indies test match took place from 15 to 19 June at the Riverside and despite the very poor weather for the first two days, it had been a great success with an estimated 50,000 spectators attending over the 5 days. Council staff managed the car parking pressures on site very well and worked effectively with the Police and County Cricket Club.

Veterans Day

Councillor R Harrison had been a major driving force behind the event and Councillor Westrip thanked him for his endeavours.

Environmental Health

Smokefree

Councillor Westrip advised that on 1 July 2007 England would go smoke free. A series of three drop-in days had been held for local businesses.

Gambling Act 2005

Approximately 13 applications were expected for various licences with a further 200 permits for amusement with prizes expected.

Contaminated Land

Officers had been working closely with an Environmental Consultancy to develop the service and an Action Plan was in place.

Empty Properties

Councillor Westrip advised that the District had in excess of 130 private sector dwellings that had been vacant for over six months. A survey of the properties and questionnaire to the owners was planned prior to development of a strategy.

Food Safety

The Food Safety Team hosted a National Food Safety Week event on 11 June focused on improving food hygiene awareness. A level 2 Food Hygiene qualification 'Food Safety in Catering' had been launched and the Council was the only authority in Durham running such a course.

Nottingham Declaration

Councillor Westrip advised that the Council was to sign the Nottingham Declaration on climate control and a detailed report would be submitted to Council in due course.

Area Based Approach Insulation Scheme

The Council was taking the lead on an area based approach to insulation and affordable warmth to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. Between 8-11,000 homes within the District would potentially benefit

Calendar

The Environmental Health Team were to issue a calendar to every property in the District advising of the services they provide. This would help with BVPI performances and address the outcomes in this area highlighted from earlier audit reports.

Planning and Building Control

Planning White Paper

The White Paper was published in May and contains major implications for development control, streamlining the process for major infrastructure projects and other appeals, altering the kind of householder development that requires planning permission as well as minor alterations to business premises and micro generation equipment. Planning fees are to rise for larger developments to reflect the real cost of processing a planning application.

Planning Committee

Councillor Westrip advised that the Planning Committee had agreed a revised 'Have Your Say' leaflet speaking procedure to provide a clearer understanding for the public on speaking at meetings of the Committee.

Planning Delivery Grant

Councillor Westrip was delighted to announce that the Council had been awarded £40,000.00 Planning Delivery Grant based on its development control performance and the number of applications it deals with, and a further award was expected in July.

Environmental Services

Good News Stories

Councillor Westrip made reference to the following matters:

- Thanks to Environmental Services for their management of the potential flood situation in partnership with other agencies
- Despite the wettest June on record, the grass cutting service had been delivered on time with no complaints
- Work had commenced on a Baby and Children Memorial Garden at Ropery Lane Cemetery
- Restructure of Environmental Services was completed to compliment the neighbourhood management process
- Involvement of Environmental Services in training initiatives
- Transfer of Grounds Maintenance at Riverside to Environmental Services

CPA Result

Councillor Westrip made reference to the CPA result and advised that as a Councillor and member of the Executive he was proud of his part in the process. He praised the Leader and the Chief executive for their outstanding leadership.

e. Health and Wellbeing

Councillor M Potts advised having met with the Directors and Services Team Managers within the area of her portfolio and would be reporting to future Council Meetings.

26 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

a. Councillor P Nathan submitted a written question to Councillor CJ Jukes in the following terms:

‘Could Councillor Jukes please give a full breakdown of the cost of the Civic Centre Regeneration scheme and its main components as well as the amount contributed directly by Chester-le-Street District Council and the specific amounts contributed by other agencies including the Arts Council, One North East and any other agencies or funding bodies which may have contributed funds directly or indirectly towards this regeneration project.’

Councillor Jukes responded to the question by quoting again the details of costs and grants as referred to in his report:

Main components of spend:

MILE House	£1,453,255
Streetscaping	£1,087,242
Civic Heart	£888,095
Culvert Strengthening	£660,164
Market Redesign	£284,602

Main sources of funding:

ONE Single Programme	£2,514,838
District Council	£2,098,604
Developers' Contribution	£165,700

b. Councillor PH May asked Councillor Barr about the lack of administrative and secretarial support for Members.

Councillor Barr advised the matter would be discussed at the next meeting of the Member Steering group.

c. Councillor PH May asked Councillor Westrip whether there were specific areas targeted for the initiative on insulation.

Councillor Westrip advised that the aim was to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty.

d. Councillor M May asked questions on the following matters related to the recent Test Match at Riverside:

- i. Inadequacy of car parks, can they be enlarged
- ii. Who decides on the level of fees for parking
- iii. Why was the children's play area close on the Sunday

The Director of Development Services responded on behalf of Councillor Westrip as follows:

- i. Because of the bad weather the overflow car parks on the spots fields were not usable.
- ii. The car park fees are agreed by Council
- iii. The main reason for closure of the play area was because of the volume of traffic in the vicinity, it was a safety issue.

e. Councillor Nathan enquired about the transparency of funding and quoted information available on the Council's web site.

Councillor Jukes advised that the Arts Council backed the scheme which enabled ONE funding to be obtained.

Councillor Ebbatson advised that the Arts Council provided funding of £25,000 to commission design of the artwork.

27 CHESTER-LE-STREET CORPORATE PLAN

A report was submitted from the Assistant Chief Executive requesting consideration of the general principles and content of the Council's Corporate Plan 2007/2010, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Assistant Chief Executive spoke in detail to the report.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor SCL Westrip, that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

"1. That the general principles and content of the Plan as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 to the report, be agreed.

2. That delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Chief Executive to make final changes and amendments to the Plan in order to publish the Plan by 30 June 2007."

28 HOME WORKING POLICY

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development seeking approval to a Home Working Policy and Procedure, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Head of Organisational Development reported on the outcome of the Home Working Pilot which involved four employees and two Members.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

" That the Home Working Policy and Procedure, as appended to the report, be approved subject to the proposals outlined in the report."

Councillor TH Harland left the meeting at 7.25pm

29 MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development on proposed revisions to the policies on Handling Restructures and Redundancy and to introduce new policies in relation to Retirement and Redeployment, copies of which had previously been circulated.

Councillor D Holding proposed, seconded by Councillor C Jukes, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“ That the following Policies and Procedures, as appended to the report, be approved:

- i. Policy and Procedure for Managing Organisational Restructures.
- ii. Redundancy Policy and Procedure
- iii. Retirement Policy and Procedure
- iv. Redeployment Policy and Procedure.”

30 REPLACEMENT PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A report was submitted from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advising of the need to appoint a replacement Parish Council representative on the Council’s Standard Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the vacancy had arisen as a result of the decision of Mrs Gill Stephenson not to stand for re-election as a Parish Councillor for Great Lumley Parish Council. All eleven Parish Councils had been invite to submit nominations and three had been received.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the Chairman of the Council be authorised to draw lots in order to choose between the nominated and eligible persons.

2. That the person so drawn first be appointed to serve as a Parish Council Representative on the Council’s Standards Committee until 31 March 2009.”

The Chairman of the Council selected one of the envelopes containing the names of the nominated persons.

“3. That Councillor Ian Clarkson from Urpeth Parish Council be so appointed.”

31 REPRESENTATION ON WALDRIDGE VILLAGE HALL TRUST

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the need to nominate a Member to serve as a Trustee of the Waldrige Village Hall Association.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that paragraph 4.6.2 in the report should be deleted.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That Councillor SCL Westrip be nominated to serve as a Trustee of the Waldrige Village Hall Association.
2. That the Officer issue a briefing note on the insurance cover for a Trustee and on the role and responsibilities of a Trustee.”

32 ANNUAL REPORT OF CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Consideration was given to the Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor containing her opinion on the effectiveness of the control environment for the 2006/07 financial year.

The Chief Internal Auditor spoke in detail to the report and advised that her unqualified opinion was that internal control was sound.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor C Jukes, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the contents of the Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor be noted and received.”

33 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2006/07

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Resources seeking approval of the Statement of Accounts for 2006/07, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Director of Resources spoke in detail to the report and advised that the Statement was scrutinised by the Audit Committee the previous week.

Councillor G Armstrong, Chairman of the Audit Committee, advised that at the Audit Committee on 22 June 2007 Members raised issues on the Statement of Accounts in relation to Revenue Outturn; Housing Revenue Account; Capital Programme; Recovery of Outstanding Debts and Reserves and Balances. Issues were raised during the meeting on Recovery of Debts and Variance on Legal and Democratic Services Outturn that could not be resolved at the time but for which Members had subsequently received answers to. With regard to the Statement of Internal Control, issues were raised in relation to the following matters:

- New guidance on corporate governance with the requirement for a Governance Statement from 2008
- Progress on business continuity
- Arrangements for securing value for money
- Procurement Strategy
- Asset Management

- Financial Management and progress in respect of scores on Key Lines of Enquiry.

Councillor Armstrong gave an assurance that the Audit Committee undertook a thorough review and scrutiny of both the Statement of Accounts and the Statement of Internal Control and recommended the Council to approve both documents.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed and Councillor GK Davidson seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED;

“1,. That the Statement of Accounts for 2006/07 be approved, subject to audit.

2. That Capital Financing for 2006/07 be determined as detailed in the report.

3. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Lead Member for Resources and Value for Money, to make any amendments to the Statement that are not material.

4. That the Statement of Internal Control be approved, subject to audit.”

34 Common Seal

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the action of the Officer in affixing the Common Seal of the Council to the following documents be confirmed:

Lease in duplicate relating to 4 Moorfoot Avenue, Chester-le-Street
 Contract in relation to land at Stella Gill to David Kevin Potter
 Transfer in relation to land at Stella Gill
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 12 Elm Avenue, Pelton Lane Ends
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 18 Riding Hill, Great Lumley
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 20 The Gardens, Chester-le-Street
 Lease induplicate relating to Unit 20 Stella Gill Industrial Estate
 Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Sacriston Carnival 16 June 2007
 Section 106 Agreement in duplicate relating to land at Drum Industrial Estate
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 26 Eighth Avenue, Chester-le-Street
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 14 Conyers Gardens, South Pelaw”

The meeting terminated at 8.00pm

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